II

SAINT SERGIUS

In the Siḥīl Quarter or Ward of Tarīm is to be found the Masjid Nabī Allāh Jarjīs—at least so the educated pronunciation of his name runs, but, said my informant, he is ordinarily called Sarjīs.

The name appears, without vocalization of course in any of the sources I quote, in *al-Mashra' al-rawī* [1] in the form Sarjīs, but reference is made to his mosque [2] *infra* as Masjid Jarjīs. From a notice in the *Manāqib al-'Aidarūs* [3] we have the record of the existence of the Masjid Sarjīs as long ago as the time of the famous Ḥaḍramī saint Sa'd al-Suwainī (ob. A.D. 1453).[4] Again the Ḥuraiḍah MS of the *Manāqib Āl Qushair* alludes to the *majrā sail Khailah taḥt Masjid Sarjīs* ' the flood-course of al-Khailah, beside the Mosque of Sarjīs '. Al-Khailah is one of the *wādīs* of Tarīm city, and I surmise that it may be this name that gives rise to the town's nickname, *khailah khailatain* ' a horse (nay !) two horses '. If so one may deduce that the Siḥīl Quarter is one of the most ancient parts of the city, especially as the nickname is said to be the exclamation of a Tarīmī on seeing the first Muslim forces camped outside its walls in pagan times.

The prophet Sarjīs is generally reckoned in Tarīm to be pre-Islāmic, and *al-Mashra' al-rawī* [1] relates that many pious Tarīmīs have met with the prophet al-Khiḍr there. The name is immediately reminiscent of Sergius ; that such foreign names were not unknown in ancient Arabia is proven from Hamdānī's [5] reference to Romanus al-Kalbī, and it seems that the memory of such a name has even persisted down to our own times in the case of the ancient king Decianus in a local legend recorded by Philby.[6] The name Sarjīs itself appears in the *Sīrah*.[7]

My attention has been drawn by Dr. J. B. Segal to the statement of Henri Charles [8] that the name Sergius has always been popular among Arabic-speaking Christians. The Bedouin, he thinks, would come into touch with sanctuaries of this saint, for from A.D. 354 oratories of Saint Sergius were very numerous in the western Limes, as well as churches and chapels. The splendid cathedral of Bosra was dedicated to the saints Sergius and Bakos, and there was a sanctuary of Sergius at the Ghassanid centre of Jabiyat. As late as A.D. 609–10 a church at Babisqa was dedicated to Saint Sergius, and both Justinian and Chosroes II

[1] Muḥ. b. Abī Bakr al-Shillī, *al-Mashra' al-rawī*, Cairo, A.H. 1319, I, 141. A list of mosques also occurs in the British Museum MS *al-Tiryāq al-shāf* of 'Umar b. Muḥ. Bā Shaibān, f. 199a, but it adds nothing to the *Mashra'*.

[2] op. cit., II, 239.

[3] Photocopy in SOAS, miracle no. 19.

[4] My 1953 notes say that the Masjid Nabī Allāh Jarjīs consists of seven mosques, and the last person who built it was a certain Ḥasan al-Wari'. Other mosques in Tarīm are said to be composed of several mosques, each named after the person who constructed or reconstructed that particular portion.

[5] *Ṣifat jazīrat al-'Arab*, op cit., 180.

[6] op. cit., 342, Dakyanus who flourished 300 years before Muḥammad.

[7] A. Guillaume, *The life of Muḥammad*, O.U.P., 1955, 668.

[8] *Le christianisme des Arabes nomades sur le Limes*, Paris, 1936, 29 seq.

Digitized by Google Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

who gave ex-voto gifts, had a strong interest in this sanctuary. Dr. E. Ullendorff has further pointed out to me that Saint Sergius is mentioned in Ethiopic sources,[1] Sergius and Bacchus having their festival on 10 Ṭĕḳĕmt.

There is, however, a further possibility in that the *Book of the Himyarites* [2] alludes to the presbyter Sergios, a Roman,[3] and again Sergius,[4] perhaps the same person, was one of the Christians martyred by Masrūq. The Syriac name has exactly the same form as our Arabic Sarjīs.

In conclusion it seems that we have to do with a Christian saint whose memory, or whose name at least, has survived some fourteen centuries. A tradition has even survived, of course, that Ḥaḍramawt had itself been Christian [5]. The allusions to the lamps in the monk's cell in Imra'u 'l-Qais [6] may, like his references to Dammūn and 'Andal, have specifically Ḥaḍramawt in mind, for the verse shows characteristically South Arabian diction. If the Sergius of al-Khailah be the same personage as the saint beloved by the northern Arabian Bedouin of former times, then his cult had surely extended a far cry to the south, but Tarīm is not so very distant from the Christian communities of Najrān which may even have survived as late as the thirteenth century A.D.[7]

[1] William Wright, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic manuscripts in the British Museum*, London, 1877, p. 160.

[2] Ed. Axel Moberg, Lund, 1924, p. cix, MS f. 14b.

[3] It is interesting to remark that there were also presbyters from Ḥīrah and Abyssinia.

[4] op. cit., p. cxvi, MS f. 24b.

[5] C. F. Beckingham and R. B. Serjeant, ' A journey by two Jesuits from Dhufār to Ṣan'ā' n 1590 ', *Geog. Jour.*, cxv, 4–6, 1950, 197.

[6] C. J. Lyall, *Commentary on ten ancient Arabic poems*, Calcutta, 1894, Ar. text p. 26. *Aw maṣābīḥu rāhibin ahāna 'l-salīṭa bi-'l-dhubāli 'l-mufattali. Salīṭ* is said to be Yemenite for sesame-oil by the lexicons—which is still true to-day; both the other words are used commonly for ' wick ', though one says *fatīlah* and not *mufattal*.

[7] Ibn al-Mujāwir, *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*, ed. O. Löfgren, Leiden, 1951–4, 209. The population consisted of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, each religion constituting one-third of the population, but Ibn al-Mujāwir does not reveal whether this is contemporary observation or merely quotation from earlier sources. A survival of the Christian community into the Middle Ages is a little unexpected, but the Jewish community, as can be ascertained from Philby, loc. cit., survived up till its final exodus a few years ago.

Digitized by Google

Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
INDIANA UNIVERSITY